

Mayor's Column for the August 14, 2013, Edition of the Evansville Review

Over the weekend I browsed through the August edition of "The Municipal," one of a number of monthly publications that come across my desktop. The featured article, authored by Sarah Wright, was entitled "Placemaking: getting to the heart of the community." Placemaking focuses on community needs, with the goal of encompassing a community's vision, values, inspirations, and assets while creating a place where people want to live. Community engagement is an important aspect of placemaking.

The Michigan Municipal League has promoted placemaking as an approach for community improvement. Michigan studied cities, including Seattle, Washington, and Portland, Oregon, that were seen as successful at placemaking. Their study found that college graduates, when deciding where to live, look first at housing and community assets; jobs are second in priority.

The League identified eight assets of strong, growing communities: physical design and walkability; green initiatives; cultural economic development; entrepreneurship; multiculturalism; messaging and technology; transit; and education. Efforts are being undertaken to assist Michigan cities in developing and implementing strategies and programs to improve their communities by focusing on the identified assets. Small-scale, doable projects have been found to bring immediate positive results to a community.

The author showcased Marquette, Michigan, placemaking efforts. Marquette provides many recreational opportunities and ways to connect with nature, and actively promotes historic preservation, taking pride in the city's history. Marquette Commons is a vibrant community gathering place with year-round activities and programming, like farmers markets, concerts, and seasonal ice skating.

Evansville has been active at placemaking. The City vision, as stated in our 2005 Smart Growth Comprehensive Plan, is inclusive and voices "neighborliness, compassion, cooperation and mutual respect for all." More than a decade ago, our community established an organization with a mission of inclusive community-building, the Evansville Community Partnership. The Evansville Common Council has recently recommitted to efforts that enhance quality of life and provide top-notch service for all residents.

City committee meetings include an agenda item for citizen comment. Extensive opportunities for citizen input have been made available as the City Park and Recreation Board works on the soon to be completed update to the 5-year Park and Recreation Plan. A citizen survey is being planned as one component of community input into the 2015 Smart Growth Comprehensive Plan Update.

Creekside Place is our citizen-supported gathering spot in the heart of our community, with its multitude of enrichment programs and activities. Our signature Leonard-Leota

Park, along with our neighborhood parks and the Grove School Community Forest Trail, provide a wide range of nature and recreational opportunities.

We have a regionally recognized Inventors and Entrepreneurs Club. An energized new women entrepreneurs group is poised to bring additional vitality to our city.

Evansville has a state reputation in the area of green initiatives. We were selected as a 2009 Pilot Wisconsin Energy Independent Community. Our annual energy fair is seen as a model for Wisconsin communities.

Downtown revitalization efforts are continuing and there is now a “buzz” of activity in the center of our city. I am often told of the beauty and charm of Evansville by both visitors and residents.

Community members formed BASE, Building A Safer Evansville, to address underage drinking and drug abuse. BASE obtained a competitive federal Drug Free America Grant to implement a community action plan. With the local match, more than \$1.25 million will be used for awareness, prevention, and education over a five-year period.

Community support for the Evansville Youth Center has been terrific. The Center is a safe, engaging, after-school place for our middle school students and will open with the start of the school year.

We have a number of community-strengthening events occurring in the next few weeks. Tonight, August 14, the Evansville Inventors and Entrepreneurs will host a special presentation by Chris Meyer, founder of Sector67 in Madison. Sector67 is an exciting business incubator that inspires entrepreneurs to launch new companies. MadREP is sponsoring the presentation and refreshments. MadREP is the Madison Region Economic Partnership, the eight-county regional economic development organization that includes Rock County. This event is free and open to the public.

Evansville Night Out, sponsored by BASE, the Evansville Police Department, EMS, and Fire District, will be held from 6-8 p.m. on Thursday, August 15, at Lake Leota. This event is family-friendly, alcohol-free, and cost-free. There will be a bike rodeo, bounce house, free food, demonstrations by the Wisconsin State Patrol, Rock County Sheriffs Department, UW MedFlight, and Madison Police Mounted Patrol, displays of various public safety vehicles, and other activities. From 8-10 p.m. there will be a free pool party.

The 6th biennial Just Desserts Volunteer Recognition will be held on Wednesday evening, September 11, from 7-8:30 p.m. at Creekside Place. Sponsored by the Evansville Community Partnership, awards are given to volunteers who have gone above and beyond in giving their time and talent to those in need. Volunteerism is community-building and creates a positive community spirit. Dessert and refreshments will be served. This event is free and open to everyone.

The 13th annual Creekside Place Health Fair will be held on Wednesday, September 25, 2013, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. This event is free and open to the public.

There will be upcoming opportunities for public input as the draft City Park and Recreation Plan Update is completed in the next few weeks. The City also encourages resident budget suggestions as we build the 2014 municipal budget in the coming weeks. Send your budget ideas to budget@ci.evansville.wi.gov. We encourage your comments and suggestions.

On Sunday, a visitor from Seattle stopped at my house. He has family in Evansville and is an Evansville School District alumnus. He told me that you can tell much about a community by how it treats its seniors and its youth. He said that Evansville is doing a great job! He is impressed with how our community has developed and how we care for our families, friends, and neighbors.

Our community does work hard at placemaking for our children and our older citizens. Our goal is further improvement for all of our residents. Active engagement by many community members will result in the best outcome for us. We encourage and desire your involvement!

City Announcements

The Wisconsin Public Service Commission is assessing broadband needs and gaps in Wisconsin. They are taking a survey to measure current and future broadband usage and needs. The residential survey can be found at <http://wisconsindashboard.org/residence-survey>. The business survey can be found at <http://wisconsindashboard.org/business-survey>. The survey deadline is Thursday, August 15. Broadband service is an issue in our area and I encourage you to take the time to complete the survey.

Infrastructure replacement is complete on Garfield Avenue and road building work has begun. Weather permitting, curb and gutter should be poured in the next week. There is a seven-day cure time for the concrete before the final road bed work commences.

Citizens are encouraged to submit nominations for the biennial Just Desserts volunteer awards. Nomination forms are available in the Evansville Review and at <http://www.evansville-wi.net>.

City Congratulations/Thanks

Evansville congratulates Harlin Miller, who was recently recognized as Creekside Volunteer of the Year. We thank Harlin for his countless hours of work and effort over many years to make Evansville a better place. He is a placemaker. Harlin is a former Evansville mayor.